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SPEECHES  
- ON -  
THE INDIAN  
DIFFICULTIES  
IN THE  
NORTH-WEST;

DELIVERED BY

**ROBERT CUNNINGHAM, M.P. & HON. DONALD A. SMITH, M.P.**

- IN -

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

APRIL 1st, 1873.

OTTAWA :

WEEK PRESS, STEAM PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT, ELGIN STREET.

1873.

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1873C

# SPEECHES

*On the Indian Difficulties in the North West; delivered by Mr. Robert  
Cunningham, M.P., and Hon. Donald A. Smith, M.P., in the  
House of Commons, April 1st, 1873.*

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MR. CUNNINGHAM said he desired to make a few remarks on this subject, but could not do so without calling attention to a strange ailment of the member for Ladgar. He never spoke on any subject at any time, or anywhere, without first making a violent attack on the Hudson Bay Company. That Company stood very much in the same relation to the hon. gentleman as King Charles's head stood to Mr. Dick, in "David Copperfield." (Laughter.) I shall not enter into the cause of this. It might not be interesting to the House, but the people in Manitoba know all about it. But he challenged the honorable gentleman to point out how in any respect whatever how in one particular the Company were liable for the present uneasiness amongst the Indians in the North West. It was men, like the hon. gentleman himself, who went about amongst the Indians, making all sorts of promises to them, never meant to be fulfilled, who created uneasiness amongst the Indians; and it is a fact, capable of proof, that the member for Ladgar, in order to secure the Indian vote, promised that he would take all the chiefs down to Ottawa, have them fêted and feasted, and get whatever amendments to the treaty they desired. (Cheers.) The Hudson Bay Company, on the contrary, never promised the Indians anything but what was fulfilled; and the whole history of the Red man, since the days of Columbus, shows nothing so successful as the rule of the Company. Whilst our American neighbours have been keeping up continual war with them the British Indian in Rupert's Land has lived peacefully, and quietly, and undisturbed; and whilst the most atrocious deeds had been committed on the south side of the line, the plains of the North-west lie all but unstained by the blood of the white man, (cheers,) and he hurled back to the honorable gentleman

the covert insinuations he had brought against the Indian policy of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Coming to the present troubles he thought the cause of this restlessness amongst the Indians was attributable to various causes. First of all there was the transition from British to Canadian rule. This they did not comprehend. Colonial relations as we understand them were utterly strange to them. Hitherto they had lived on British Territory, and as they considered under British protection, but they were left alone with their hunting grounds free to them to roam over when and where they chose. They followed the buffalo and lived on it, and when starvation stared them in the face, as often it has done, they had always a dernier resort in the Hudson's Bay Company to fall back upon, but now things were altered. They heard of the white man coming in from Canada to take possession of their lands, to drive away the buffalo and exterminate them, and reasoning quite naturally they came to the conclusion that Canada was a different power from England; and here he might state that one great blunder was committed last summer which had not only had great effect in bringing about this state of things, but had in a great measure caused the Indians to lose any confidence they might have in Canadian faithfulness. Early in the season the Governor of the North West sent to the Chiefs on the Saskatchewan an autograph letter, informing them that the Indian Commissioner from Canada would meet them in the neighborhood of Fort Edmonton, in the month of August. The Governor did this in all good faith, relying on the Commissioner to fulfil the promise he had made, but what was the result? The tribes congregated from all parts in the month of August, they waited, but no Commissioner either came nor was anything heard of such a functionary making his approach. In the end, forced by sheer starvation, they left for their hunting grounds thoroughly convinced that no faith was to be placed on Canadian pledges or promises, and with the full determination to have nothing to do in the way of treaty with a nation on whom no reliance could be placed. It was altogether an unfortunate occurrence, for if there was one thing more than another that should be attended to in dealing with that people, it was carefulness in making promises when made. (hear hear). But there were other causes for this state of things in the North-west; one of these was the American element. Were there no more involved in this than simply traffic in furs with the Indians, it would not necessarily involve much cause for concern or interference; but what was the essential element in this traffic? It was

rum. These Americans were, for the most part, men of the most lawless character—murderers, outlaws and escaped convicts. These were the kind of men that were playing against us in the North West. At first, when comparatively few in number, they were more cautious, and plied their trade in secret; but now, increased in numbers, and having ingratiated themselves with the Indians, they set all law at defiance, and carry on their illicit traffic openly and defiantly. As an instance, last summer waggon loads of highwhines were carried into the territory by a band of these ruffians. They settled down in the immediate neighbourhood of Fort Edmonton, the Indians came around, the liquor was traded for furs, and murders and outrages of the most appalling character were of almost daily occurrence. The whole territory was demoralized to a frightful extent. When August approached, fearing lest the Commissioner might appear accompanied by troops, they made off across the line; but when they discovered that there was little to be feared on this score, they returned with new supplies and were again at work as vigorously as ever. Nor was this a solitary instance, bands of these men were to be found all over the North West. Now it would be observable at a glance that these ruffians had everything to lose and nothing to look forward to but ruin, by the establishment of vigorous Canadian rule in the territory, and in order to the prevention of this being accomplished, they were leaving no stone unturned. Indians were plied with rum, Canadian rule was pictured out to them in the most repulsive colours. The most outrageous lies as to the calamities that would befall them should Canada ever come into possession of their hunting grounds were propagated, in fact they had wrought many of them up to such a pitch that they spit at the very name of Canada. Looking forward to disturbances they were arming them as fast as their grips would allow with rifles, and in fact we had virtually to day in the North-west hostile people to deal with. But there was still a third element in this North-west difficulty well worthy of careful watching. It was calculated that at present on the little Saskatchewan and other rivers there were at work upwards of a thousand miners gathering gold dust from the sands of those streams. At any moment the cry might be raised of immense gold discoveries in the territory, and what would be the result, why tens of thousands of the border ruffians would instantaneously rush in, and where would Canadian rule be then? where would the Dominion Lands Act list? They might raise the Republican flag at their will, and there was no man there who would dare to attempt to make them afraid. That the

Americans have had their eye on this North West Territory, was a well known fact, and when Louis Riel was in charge of the Government affairs, almost incredible, were held out to him, and certain documents even placed on the table of this House and quite probably there would be men who would wonder how so young and so poor a man as Louis Riel, unless actuated by the strongest patriotism, could ever have resisted the tempting offers, (hear hear). Now, with these facts before us the question arose, what was to be done? It was quite clear that something must be done something sharp, short and decisive. The time for writing despatches was gone by and the difficulties must be grappled with, and that successfully, or our hold on the North West might be endangered and an enormous expense of life and money lost; and in dealing with these men it must be remembered we are not about to deal with uncivilized Indians, not with the untutored, and, in many respects, the noble children of the forest as they were in the days of William Penn. In one sense of the term they were just as civilized as we were. They could not read nor write, nor did they pay any attention to religious matters, but in a business sense they were civilized to a greater extent than people imagined. The day had been when a valuable fur could have been purchased from an Indian for a needle, but those days were done, for in the matter of trade they were just as keen and wide awake as the white trader who had to deal with them. In approaching them in the way of treaty we must do so in a business fashion. The old style of trading was a failure, and was so regarded by the Indian himself. About a year and a half ago he saw something of our Indian treaty, and this was the way of it: On the plain around lower Fort Carry were the camps, the squaws formed around the wigwams, and the Chief, over half nude, squatted on the ground playing cards. For the most part the atmosphere was saturated with the steam of pork cooking, the lawn was gravelled over with ten leaves, and the very dogs, ordinarily the very embodiments of starvation, looked sleek and fat. In front of the Fort were squatted the Chiefs solemnly smoking their pipes, and at about ten o'clock the door of the Fort residence opened, and out walked Commissioner Simpson with cocked hat, with a white plume waving gracefully over it; a brilliant scarlet coat, and dazzling gold stripes on his trousers. Behind walked the Governor, also adorned with a cocked hat and plumes, his drummer jacket or Windsor uniform, or whatever you choose to call it. Then followed the Court train, composed of ladies and kid gloved gentlemen, while in the rear occasionally marched the lofty

man for liquor, patronizing the whole crowd. (Loud laughter.) The Indians and all smoked the pipe and passed it around, but Governor Archibald abhorred the very mention of the pipe, for he hated tobacco in any form, and that big pipe, probably a hundred years old, in the potency of its age, often times made him sorely sick. (Loud laughter.) Every morning the Commissioner would inquire whether they had come to any determination as to the Treaty. To this the invariable reply was, "Well, not yet, but very near it; we were very near it last night." The Commissioner would then tell them how anxious their great mother over the sea was about this matter, that she was waiting very eagerly to hear if her children had made the Treaty; and when one looked at the tear that twinkled in the eyes of these Indians when the great mother question was brought up, he could not help coming to the conclusion that it was all a farce. This went on at that spot for about five weeks. Incredible quantities of pork, tea, tobacco and sundries were consumed, and the whole resulted in an annuity of three dollars a head, with a reserve of 50 acres of land to each being granted to the mother-with a little expense bill of some \$50,000. (Hear, hear.) To his mind the whole thing, both in the manner it was done and its results, was a solemn farce, for to day these very swamps were as discontented as ever and had repudiated the treaty on fire, and what more could be expected, for if he had been rightly informed the terms of the treaty, meagre as they were, had not been complied with. It appeared to him that in dealing with this matter the Dominion must make up its mind to two things, first she must treat with these people in no niggardly spirit, and secondly she must have an armed force in the valley of the Saskatchewan. It was all very well to send an emblem of power in the shape of a cocked hat and a scarlet coat, but then we must have the force itself. Look at what the Americans have done on the northern frontier of Dakota and Montana. At this moment they had along the line or near it fifteen forts occupied by 3,000 men, involving an annual expenditure of \$5,000,000, and were we to expect that, with the same material to deal with, we were to manage the whole for a few thousand dollars? But it might be asked why do the Americans expend so much in this way? For two reasons. First, to give security to the few people who had settled there already, and as a sense of security to the settlers who were coming. They had read the history of northern Minnesota. A stream of immigration was pouring into those fertile plains which, if it continued uninterrupted, would have made it one of the richest stretches of



country in the Union. Villages were springing up on all hands; the banks of the rivers and streams were fast settling up, and every sign of prosperous development was manifest. But what be it to-day? A lonely wilderness. All of the villages that remained were the posts of the build- ings rotted down to the surface, the big ruined walls of some mouldering colleges, with here and there a little mound telling where another victim lies. (Cheers.) That was one of the experiences from which America had learned a salutary lesson. She knew that had these numerous not occurred she would have been deriving wealth from those rich plains without the cost it would have taken to have given the protection that would have prevented them, and if we really desire the development and speedy settlement of our territory we must take similar precautions to secure both; for just as sure as troubles begin, then so sure would Manitoba be the scene of conflict. (Hear, hear.) The temptations were too numerous, and the amount of plunder to be got was too great to be resisted, and however the conflict might eventuate it would be equally disastrous to the province and territory. Were they driven back it could not be done without slaughter too terrible to contemplate; were they to succeed there would be an end to the settlement of the North-west for many a year to come. What we should see to was that such promptitude should be shown with vigorous action taken and such rational means employed as would be successful in averting so great a calamity as he conceived to be imminent, and American cunning, whether manifested by the trader or by those in authority, countermanded by Canadian vigor and enterprise. That the Indians were on the march was certain and that that march had no friendly bearing on the Canadian rule he was convinced, and unless active, vigorous measures were resorted to, he feared the worst. (Cheers.) With regard to the proposed Commission, suggested by the Government, he must state frankly that he had no faith in it whatever. The Lieutenant Governor had enough to do in his capacity as Governor; the history of the land office in Fort Garry clearly demonstrated that it would require all the energies of any one man to keep it in working order, as for the rest he would say nothing. But this he would venture to say that before a year that Commission would be found incompetent to deal with this great matter. What was required in dealing with these Indians was to send to them men who know them, their habits, their mode of reasoning, and their prejudices. And in the Province to-day there were men ready and willing, and thoroughly capable of taking this work upon them. Men of education too, and were this matter entrusted to such men,

armed with ample powers, to treat, he could look forward with some hope of a satisfactory result; but with a Commission such as had been indicated, he anticipated nothing but failure and trouble. (Loud Cheers.)

Mr. Howe having replied,

Mr. Harris said the question before the House is one, the importance of which can hardly be overestimated in its bearing on the future of the Dominion, as, if injudiciously treated, it may result in disasters requiring many years to overcome. (Hear.) Not having been in the House until towards the close of the remarks made by the hon. member for Niagara I have been inhibited for the substance of them to the speech of the hon. gentleman from Marquette, but every honorable member who has been any length of time in this House must know that it is impossible for the member for Niagara to touch on any subject, no matter what it may be, without dragging in the Hudson's Bay Company with the view of exhibiting them in anything but a favorable light to the public. Now, I regard it as of so very little importance what that hon. gentleman may choose to say of the Hudson Bay Company that I would not have cared to refer to him in this matter, or to the Hudson's Bay Company, in connection with it, were it not that a certain amount of credit might attach to it, owing to the observations which fell from the Hon. the Secretary of State for the Province.

I must confess that it was with no little surprise I heard that hon. gentleman speak as he did, and the House will probably agree with me in opinion that it must have been not less a matter of astonishment to his colleagues in the Ministry, who, in this instance at least, must have heartily desired to have been saved from their friends.

The administration of the Hudson's Bay Company during the long series of years they occupied the North-West Territories, may well be left to be judged on its merits by those most intimately connected with them in that quarter; but further, the House and the Government will recollect that, when the transfer of Rupert's Land was being made (through the medium of the Imperial Government) to Canada, the Secretary of State for the Colonies spoke in the most approving terms of the manner in which that Company had conducted the affairs in connection with the Indians, and of their treatment of these people, inculcating on the Government of this country that they might well follow the example which had been so set them. (Hear, hear).

The hon. the Provincial Secretary himself has borne testimony to this

in representing that throughout the whole term of the government of that country by the Hudson's Bay Company peace, quietness and goodwill had prevailed within its limits; but, unfortunately, entirely ignoring the great changes which have latterly taken place in the circumstances and condition of the North-West, he goes on to say that, since the happy state of affairs just referred to had been of so long continuance, the Government had a right to look to that Company to see that they should not be interrupted.

Did the hon. gentleman forget that in former years the Company and the natives were equally a necessity to each other? That the latter had none others to look to to supply them with those articles which to them were absolutely essential to procure them the necessaries of life, and that for those they gave in exchange to that Company the produce of the chase.

The Hudson's Bay Company did not attempt to take from them any portion of the lands over which they roamed, (hear, hear,) and in cultivating even the small area required for supplying them with vegetables they took care to plant seed sufficient to yield enough, after ensuring full provision for their own wants, to permit at least one-half or two-thirds of the crop being appropriated by the Indians.

While such was then the case how different is it now? The very fact of immigration into that country implies the occupation of the land for agricultural purposes, thus depriving the Indian of those means of living which had been his and his forefathers, and to which alone it seems possible for him to adapt himself. Is it then surprising, that, interrupted in the peaceable possession of those hunting grounds which he had ever considered as his own inalienable possession, he should be inclined to look with an unfriendly eye on the intruder; and is it to be supposed, or would it be reasonable to expect, that the Hudson's Bay Company, or any other corporation or body of individuals under circumstances so changed, could have continued success in following the policy admirably adapted in the one case but wholly powerless to meet the exigencies of the other. (Cheers.)

The relationship between the Indian and the Hudson's Bay Company was one of implicit faith and confidence by the former in the integrity of the latter—that is, the native felt and believed that in the hands of the Company, he would be fairly, justly, and liberally dealt with, and above all things he knew that a promise once made to him would be faithfully fulfilled.

How, then, need we wonder that, after having been assured by the representative of the Queen, his great mother, that her Commissioner would meet him at a certain time to confer with him, and to bring him gifts as a preliminary to arrangements for yet more material advantages to be enjoyed by him, as a compensation for the loss he would sustain by having his hunting grounds so greatly circumscribed. Is it, Mr. Speaker, at all to be wondered at, that, having assembled on this invitation, finding no one prepared to treat with him, and not even a reason assigned for the disappointment, it should have appeared to him a gross breach of faith.

That such promises were made to the Indians by Governor Archibald, (of whom I would speak with the highest respect, and who I fully believe did all that under the circumstances it was in his power to do) cannot I think be denied; but, unfortunately, he felt that it was impossible for him to act as he would have desired.

In the early part of the summer it was understood that the Indian Commissioner, Mr. Simpson, was to proceed to the Saskatchewan on this mission—a purpose interfered with by the untoward events attending his visit to Fort Francis, in connexion with the duties of his office, in consequence of which he felt constrained to postpone entering into any other negotiations with the Indians without further instructions from the Government, and so the Summer and Autumn passed without anything having been done. Mr. Simpson doubtless meant well, and both did and would have done all he was capable of performing. It is true, as represented by the hon. Provincial Secretary, that Mr. Simpson had been an officer of the Hudson's Bay Company, and I have every desire to speak with respect of that gentleman, whom I have the privilege of regarding as a personal friend: but, unfortunately, he had had no experience whatsoever of the Blackfeet and other tribes of Indians on the Plains, and although, as already mentioned, he had been formerly in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, he would not have been selected by them as best fitted for that delicate and important mission.

At present the condition of that country is far from being satisfactory. (Hear.) You have some thousands of Indians dissatisfied with the treatment they have received at the hands of the Government, whose promises have so far been unfulfilled. You have besides, as refugees from across the line, some of the most desperate and reckless characters to be found on the Continent, bringing in with them, and spreading broadcast among the Indians, strong drinks, and supplying them with arms. These men, one

of whom—a notorious criminal, named, I believe, Johnstone—reported to have murdered a Marshall of the United States, have encamped within the Canadian Territory, at a place to which they have very appropriately given the name of “Stand-off Fort,” defying alike the Americans, who dare not, looking to international law, cross over to them, and the Government of this country, which unfortunately has there no means of protecting itself even against such desperadoes.

In all that country, extending over so many hundreds—nay thousands of miles, not only is there no military force, but not even a single constable; and, although some Justices of the Peace have been appointed for it, they are utterly powerless, having no force to back them. That the state of things as just shown is most perilous for this country can not, I think, be doubted by one member of this House; nor ought it to be forgotten that we have within the North-West country a considerable number of Sioux, being a portion of that same body of men who, in Dakota and Minnesota only a few years back, were the perpetrators of those fearful outrages on the settlers; the very mention of which struck the civilized world with a thrill of horror, but which were esteemed by those people as deeds of bravery, entitling them to the approval of the tribe. Can it for a moment be supposed that the very nature of these men has been so greatly changed within so short a time that they would be altogether incapable of again following the same course should circumstances so favor their doing so, and more especially, as is apprehended may be the case, if joined by the more numerous bands of Sioux from the American side. In my humble opinion it would be unwise to trust over-much to retaining the continued possession of that most valuable portion of the Dominion, unless steps are speedily taken for the protection of life and property therein. (Hear, hear.) The hon. member for Marquette having stated that, during the existence of the troubles in the North-west in 1869-1870, an effort was made to tamper with the allegiance of a certain portion of the community by the offer of large sums of money—a statement freely made and very generally believed at the time—I would remark that, while far from approving all that was done in the new Province of Manitoba at that time, I fully own with that hon. gentleman that since we have been so lavish in attributing blame, we ought also not to be backward in giving what credit can fairly be given to those who resisted, what to many would unquestionably have been a great temptation. (Hear.) The hon. Provincial Secretary amongst his other remarks was pleased to say that it might be, and no

doubt was, for the interest of certain persons that troops should be stationed near the several posts, as, in furnishing the supplies necessary for their subsistence, very considerable profit would be made; but, in so far as it may have been intended to apply this to the Hudson's Bay Company, I would, Mr. Speaker, beg to say that, at this time, that Company has no contracts for supplying the troops in Manitoba, or if any only one or two to a very trifling amount. And, further, in this statement the Right Honorable Premier will bear me out, that the Hudson's Bay Company have not, up to this time, received the rents or other remuneration to which they are unquestionably entitled, for the numerous buildings belonging to them occupied by these troops and for other Government purposes. (Hear, hear.) In the neighboring country we find military forts studded all along its border, which at this moment are being increased, and Canada, having acquired the territory, must also assume the responsibility of governing and giving protection on her side. I confess my own opinion to be that both a military and civil force will be required efficiently to do so. That some force be provided, and that immediately, whether under the name of the Mounted Police or otherwise matters not much, is imperatively demanded, and I trust the Government will lose not one day unnecessarily in furnishing this protection, and this before any endeavour is made to make treaties with the Indians, who will doubtless be far more easily satisfied when, coming to a conference for the cession of their lands, they find that the Government is prepared to maintain the majesty of the law under all circumstances. It will unquestionably be good policy, and the only true policy, to deal justly and most liberally with the Indians, and looking to the comparatively small number, leaving outside altogether those across the line, who cannot be considered as having any claim on this Government, who will be entitled to participate in any grant, I consider that the Government can afford to deal liberally with them. How this is to be done, and through whose direct agency, is a matter for very careful consideration, and I agree in opinion with the hon. member for Marquette that, for this purpose, not one Commissioner alone, but a commission composed of several gentlemen of high character, and having also a practical knowledge of the business to be dealt with, would be by far the preferable mode. Until this matter of the Indian treaty and of protection has been disposed of, immigrants cannot be expected to settle in the country, and in view of the works in connection with the Railways, &c., proposed to be

carried on, it would be imprudent in the extreme to leave the question longer in its present unsettled state, and amongst the provisions to be made none is perhaps of greater importance than that of interdicting, so far as may be possible to do so, the introduction of intoxicating liquors into the country, the use of which by the Indians, as is well known, has ever been attended with the most baneful consequences, and this House has, I think, Mr. Speaker, a right to expect the Government will now deal with the subject promptly and efficiently. (Cheers.) The Right Hon. Premier having replied, and in intimating what the Government purpose doing in dealing with this matter, having stated that a Commission will be formed, to be composed of the Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Territories, the head of the Land Department, and the Indian Commissioner to be sent from Canada; Mr. Smith continued: I understand the Right Hon. gentleman to say that the Government intend to appoint a Commission to be composed of three gentlemen—the Lieutenant Governor, the gentleman at the head of the Land service in the Province, and the Indian Commissioner. Now, I think it would be a great improvement to have associated in this Commission one or two gentlemen having a practical knowledge of the country. I do not desire that any one connected with the Hudson's Bay Company should be appointed. In fact, I would prefer it otherwise. But there are other men in the country, well fitted for the work, to be found among what is known as the "Half-breed population." And here I would remark that this term, not unfrequently employed as a title of inferiority, appears to me to be entirely a misnomer. Those who have had an opportunity of residing with this people know that they are nowise inferior. You may, in any city of the Dominion, find men who are neither pure Scotch, English, Irish, nor French, but who are not, for that reason, inferior to men of unmixed blood, and such is not less the case in Manitoba and the North-West. Therefore, having such men in Manitoba, capable in every respect of rendering good service, it would manifestly be of the utmost advantage to have their assistance in this matter. The Indian has the greatest respect for treaties, and he looks upon it that those with whom he has made treaties should regard them equally, and this I have no doubt the Government will do, while taking great care that the provisions of any such treaty to be entered into, while doing full justice to the Indian, will not be unnecessarily aggressive on the resources of the country. (Cheers.)

